

2020 Utility Symposium Takeaways

Highlighting PEG, WTRG & ATO

Utilities

\$	Rating		Price	FY EPS				Price Target	
Ticker	Curr.	Prior	12/09/20	2020E		2021E		To	From
				Curr.	Prior	Curr.	Prior		
Diversified Electric Utilities									
PEG	1	NC	56.89	3.43	NC	3.38	NC	69.00	NC
Natural Gas LDCs									
ATO	1	NC	97.75	4.72A	NCA	5.00	NC	114.00	NC
Water Utilities									
WTRG	1	NC	47.70	1.58	NC	1.65	NC	52.00	47.00

Source: Company data and Wells Fargo Securities, LLC estimates

1 = Overweight, 2 = Equal Weight, 3 = Underweight, V = Volatile

NA = Not Available, NC = No Change, NE = No Estimate, NM = Not Meaningful

• **Summary.** On 12/8 & 12/9, over 35 electric, gas and water utilities participated in virtual investor meetings at the 2020 Virtual Midstream and Utility Symposium. The tone of conversations was quite positive with companies cautiously optimistic on sales growth into 2021 and poised to advance de-carbonization strategies. In the comments below we expand on general industry takeaways and highlight PEG, WTRG (also increase price target) and ATO as timely investment ideas.

• **No Shortage of Investment Opportunities...** Between aging wires and pipes and the push toward de-carbonization, companies touted significant infrastructure investment opportunities with visibility well beyond the 5-year planning horizons. On the electric generation front, a number of utilities are scheduled to file IRPs in 2021 (BKH, CMS, EVRG, NI, OGE, XEL) with most executives pointing to renewables and peaking gas as the most likely resource solutions. In terms of coal retirements, companies generally are not expecting significant pressure from the Biden EPA only because many have already taken steps to accelerate coal retirements. That said, stricter emission regulations could provide greater justification for local stakeholders to accelerate retirements as several companies are still working out the details on recovery of the un-depreciated plant balances with securitization discussions going on in a number of states.

• **...Gating Factor is Customer Rates.** Utilities are always mindful of customer rate pressure, but we sensed a heightened sensitivity in light of COVID-related considerations. Regulators and politicians have pushed back on requested rate increases during the pandemic with the most recent example being the PA ALJ recommendation to deny NI's rate increase along with less overt actions including downward pressure on allowed ROEs (AZ). In response, many utilities are increasing programs to support low income customers and tightening their belts on the O&M front. Should utilities be able to create rate headroom via cost controls, fuel savings (steel for fuel) and, for certain utilities, customer growth, it could support the acceleration of capex and rate base growth.

• **Comments continue on page 2.**

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Please see page 5 for rating definitions, important disclosures and required analyst certifications. All estimates/forecasts are as of 12/10/20 unless otherwise stated. 12/10/20 00:20:41 ET

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- **New Technology Roundup.** We continue to sense a greater willingness on the part of the historically risk averse utility sector to embrace new technologies. We think this is being driven by a confluence of factors including (1) real and perceived policy pressure (at the state & federal levels), (2) customer demand for clean energy (both C&I and residential) and (3) the growing influence of ESG investing – is it just us or do company executives sound increasingly apologetic if stated generation resource plans still include coal in 2040? Several utilities indicated the potential to either accelerate or scale-up investments in battery storage (CMS) and EV-related infrastructure (DTE, XEL). And, in a mini eyebrow raising move, on 12/8 NEE acquired eIQ Mobility, a provider of software solutions to help assess fleets for a potential transition to electricity or hydrogen fuel. NEE indicated that the acquisition was part of the ongoing “dip your toes” approach into green hydrogen – and that the technology is still several years away from being a “needle mover” from an earnings standpoint – but the momentum continues to build.
- **M&A.** There was a lot of chatter regarding CNP’s recent announcement regarding plans to sell LDCs in AR and OK. Nearby utilities BKH and OGS indicated a general openness to giving the assets a look, but not at valuations in the 1.5-2X rate base range – both expressed skepticism that their bids (if they bid) would prevail and appeared content to see a higher valuation from another party, which could lend support for LDC valuations overall. Northern utilities ALE and WEC did not express an interest in the assets and AQN commented that while they haven’t ruled LDC acquisitions out, mgmt. prefers electric and water. SR provided broad comments that the company has been out of the M&A space due to frothy takeout multiples and would re-engage at more reasonable valuations along with cultural and regulatory considerations. While not categorically ruling out M&A, NWE noted they like the current electric/gas mix as well as serving areas where gas is not under attack and therefore cannot imagine moving outside of their Midwest region (but did not specify if AR and OK are in their region). Lastly, SWX expressed an openness to acquisitions, which would bolster the utility portion of the earnings mix, but did not comment specific to CNP’s assets. More broadly, we think the need to create rate headroom in order to accelerate de-carbonization strategies could drive strategic combinations that offer scale and synergies.
- **Gas LDCs Strike A Positive Tone.** With the LDC utility business model in the spotlight as the electrification theme looms, we sensed greater comfort among gas executives that key stakeholders are acknowledging the role of gas distribution infrastructure in the pursuit of affordable de-carbonization (even in NJ). Companies also highlighted continued strong demand for LDC service including healthy new customer connect trends and opportunities to build-out the gas system into new areas. Consistent with the Q3 calls, most of the companies are actively exploring RNG opportunities and beginning to research the potential of adding hydrogen to the gas mix (early days). When asked whether RNG/hydrogen will detract from natural gas’ affordability argument, executives drew a parallel with renewables in their infancy suggesting there’s a need and expectation that the cost curves will be driven down over time. The LDCs also touted energy efficiency programs as a much more cost effective avenue toward de-carbonization.

Featured Picks

• Public Service Enterprise Group (PEG/Overweight)

We like the set up for PEG heading into '21 as the company continues to transition to an appealing clean energy, predominantly regulated utility story (85% of earnings). Potential catalysts include (1) completion of the planned sale of the non-regulated fossil fuel and solar generation assets, which will simplify and “clean” up the story, (2) likely additional regulated capex arising out the CEF filings (Cloud & EV) and a new potential accelerated infrastructure investment program and (3) greater clarity on the long-term earnings profile for the nuclear fleet pending the outcome of an ongoing NJ BPU investigation. In the near-term, mgmt. is quite optimistic that the BPU will bless the \$721mm CEF-Energy Cloud (AMI) (an all or nothing proposal) but is a little bit more iffy on the \$261mm CEF-EV proposal. Evidentiary hearings on both the Energy Cloud and EV filings have been suspended as parties engage in settlement discussions. Separately, we touched on PEG’s recent decision to acquire a 25% ownership interest in Ørsted’s Ocean Wind project. While not unexpected, the decision frees up mgmt. to discuss the longer-term offshore wind opportunities that will likely sequence after Ocean Wind. Ørsted has 2,400 MW remaining in the Ocean Wind lease area and PEG/Ørsted jointly own the 1,000 MW Garden State Offshore Energy (GSOE) lease area. Now that PEG has opted into Ocean Wind 1, we fully expect Ørsted/PEG to jointly pursue future solicitations in NJ and the Mid-Atlantic (i.e., MD); this could set up for additional growth opportunities post '25 that will supplement PSE&G’s strong rate base growth. As for the initial Ocean Wind stake, PEG will generate a substantial amount of cash upfront by taking the ITC & MACRS tax benefits (PEG has a U.S. tax appetite whereas Ørsted does not). We reiterate our Overweight rating and maintain our \$69/sh price target.

• **Essential Utilities (WTRG/Overweight)**

We came away from our WTRG meeting incrementally more bullish on the name and believe there are potential near-term catalysts to build upon the stock's recent strength. First, CEO Chris Franklin expressed confidence in the ability to get the pending DELCORA deal done and believes the judge may rule by Christmas on Delaware County's two legal challenges – the most important of which is the validity of the asset purchase agreement. Mr. Franklin reiterated that the County's concerns seem to be around the price and use of proceeds as opposed to be against actually selling to WTRG. As we have previously opined, a last minute settlement still cannot be ruled out. We believe the DELCORA deal represents material long-term value given meaningful capex needs that fall beyond the current 5-year forecast as well as the likely substantial wastewater tuck-in deals that could transpire in the area. Second, management believes investors will find the 1/11 guidance event constructive both in terms of the updated 3-year EPS and rate base growth outlook as well as environmental commitments at Peoples. Finally, we talked about the water and wastewater M&A pipeline and there continues to be attractive, sizeable opportunities that not too long ago WTRG would have never thought possible. We reiterate our Overweight rating and increase our 12-18 month price target to \$52/share (29X our 22E EPS of \$1.78) from \$47.

• **Atmos Energy Corporation (ATO/Overweight)**

ATO is our top pick in the Gas LDC space. We see the opportunity for multiple expansion from the current ~10% premium to gas peers. ATO is not a catalyst rich name, but offers consistent 6-8% EPS growth, a relatively low-risk regulated strategy, a strong balance sheet with well above-average credit metrics, supportive regulatory mechanisms and an excellent track record in our view. ATO also operates in gas-friendly states with ~70% of rate base in TX where we expect to see legislation proposed in 2021 that would prohibit the adoption of local bans on new gas hookups. We think continued execution through 2021 along with improving sentiment toward the LDC group will drive outperformance. We reiterate our Overweight rating and maintain our \$114/sh price target.

Acronyms:

ALJ – Administrative Law Judge
 AMI – Advanced Metering Infrastructure
 BPU – Board of Public Utilities
 C&I – Commercial & Industrial
 DELCORA – Delaware County Regional Water Quality Control Authority
 EPA – Environmental Protection Agency
 ESG – Environmental, Social, Governance
 EV – Electric Vehicle
 IRP – Integrated Resource Plan
 ITC – Investment Tax Credit
 LDC – Local Distribution Company
 MACRS – Modified Accelerated Cost Recovery System
 MW – Megawatt
 O&M – Operations & Maintenance
 RNG – Renewable Natural Gas

Rating Basis Information:

ATO Thesis: We are attracted to ATO's highly visible growth outlook, pure play regulated gas strategy and strong balance sheet. We do not believe these positive features are adequately reflected in the current share price.

PEG Thesis: We believe PEG shares offer investors an attractive risk/reward proposition. Key features include (1) a premier utility with well-above average rate base & EPS growth prospects, (2) a carbon-free nuclear generation fleet that generates significant FCF and (3) a strong balance sheet, which provides the company with financial flexibility.

WTRG Thesis: Our Overweight rating is premised on our belief that WTRG shares do not fully reflect the company's strong fundamentals which include a proven EPS growth strategy, a rate base that is growing at a mid-to-upper single digit CAGR, constructive regulatory treatment (particularly in PA where roughly 70% of earnings are derived and near-term regulatory risk is low as both the water and gas utilities completed rate cases in 2019), an efficient operating model and a solid financial profile. We believe relatively low risk, regulated EPS growth of at least 6% is achievable driven by the timely rate recognition of elevated pipeline infrastructure investment needs for the foreseeable future supplemented by water/wastewater municipal M&A trends.

Price Target Information:

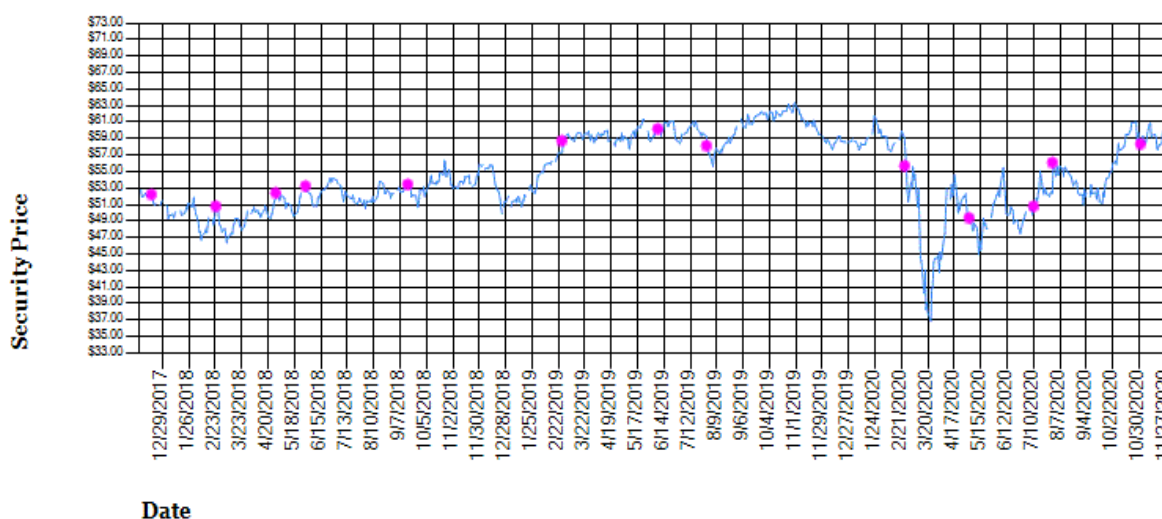
PEG Basis and Risks: Our \$69/sh price target is based on a sum-of-the-parts analysis consisting of (1) \$60.50/sh for PSE&G/Enterprise/Other (~20.5X our 22E EPS of \$2.94) and (2) \$8.50/sh for PSEG Power based on a DCF analysis. Risks to our valuation include earnings sensitivity to commodity prices, operational risks, unfavorable regulatory/political developments particularly as it relates to PEG's nuclear fleet.

ATO Basis and Risks: Our price target is based on a P/E multiple analysis (apply a 15-20% premium to the Gas LDC peer group multiple of ~18X on our '22E EPS). Key risks include regulatory risk (primarily in TX), potential pushback to rate increases, risk of gas-related incidents, and fluctuations in the Rider Rev mechanism at APT.

WTRG Basis and Risks: Our \$52/share price target reflects both a P/E multiple and DDM analysis. In terms of P/E, we apply a 70% water/30% gas utility hybrid multiple to our 2022E of \$1.78. For WTRG's water utility multiple, we ascribe a roughly 5% discount to the 21E multiple we use for AWK (34-34.5X, which is a 5-10% premium to the pure play water peer group median). We consider AWK to be WTRG's closest peer on the water side based on scale, key states/regions and municipal consolidation strategies. The roughly 5% discount reflects a modestly lower earnings growth rate (we forecast 6-7% for WTRG's water business vs. 8% for AWK) as well as lower ESG appeal (primarily due to the Peoples gas utility). For WTRG's gas utility multiple, we utilize the 21E pure play gas LDC median of 19X (based on ATO, NWN, OGS & SR) and then apply a 5-10% premium to it. We believe a premium is warranted as (1) Peoples is at the early stages of a multi-year accelerated pipeline replacement effort which is expected to drive healthy rate base growth for the foreseeable future (WTRG's 3-year guidance is 8-10%), (2) we believe Western PA, which sits above the prolific Marcellus and Utica shale plays, is largely immune to the anti-gas sentiment impacting some areas of the country and (3) most of Peoples falls under the constructive PA regulatory framework. Key risks relate to regulatory, Peoples gas deal integration and M&A strategy execution.

Required Disclosures

Public Service Enterprise Group Incorporated (PEG) 3-yr. Price Performance



Date	Published Price (\$)	Rating Code*	Price Target	Val. Rng. Low	Val. Rng. High	Close Price (\$)
12/4/2017		Kalton				
12/4/2017	NA	1	56	NE	NE	52.89
12/18/2017	52.30	1	59	NE	NE	51.97
2/25/2018	50.53	1	56	NE	NE	50.53
4/30/2018	52.02	1	57	NE	NE	52.15
5/31/2018	52.98	1	63	NE	NE	52.98
9/16/2018	53.27	1	60	NE	NE	53.27
2/27/2019	58.56	1	66	NE	NE	58.56
6/9/2019	60.01	1	72	NE	NE	60.01
7/30/2019	57.87	1	69	NE	NE	57.89
2/26/2020	55.57	1	67	NE	NE	55.57
5/4/2020	49.14	1	57	NE	NE	49.14
7/12/2020	50.59	1	65	NE	NE	50.59
7/31/2020	55.94	1	68	NE	NE	55.94
11/1/2020	58.15	1	69	NE	NE	58.15

*Effective December 7, 2019, Wells Fargo Securities' Equity Research modified its ratings definitions. Complete definitions of current ratings can be found below. For information related to prior ratings definitions, please contact equityresearch1@wellsfargo.com.

Source: Wells Fargo Securities, LLC estimates and Reuters data

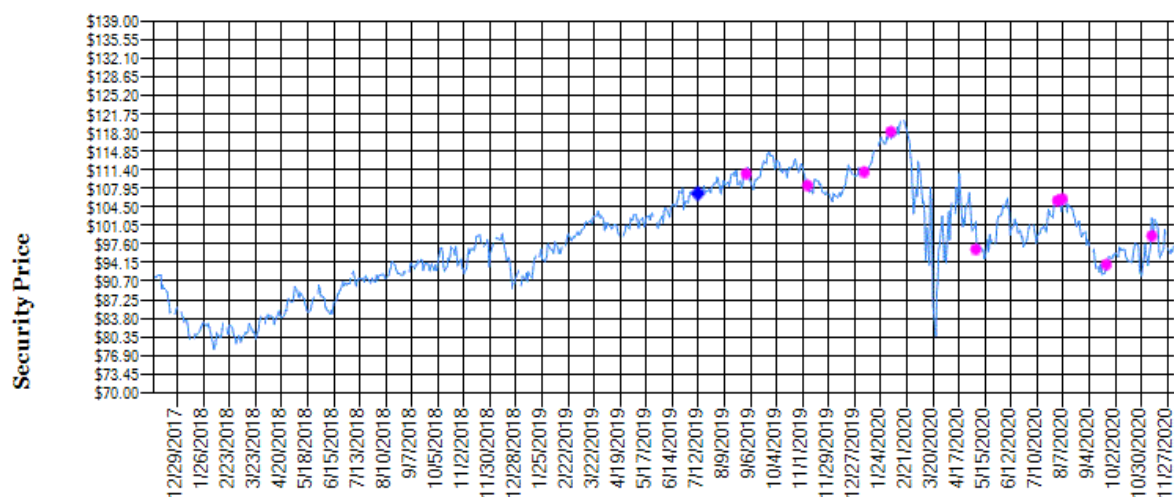
Symbol Key

- ▼ Rating Downgrade
- ▲ Rating Upgrade
- Price Target/Val Range Change
- ◆ Initiation, Resumption, Drop or Suspend
- Analyst Change
- Split Adjustment

Rating Code Key

- 1 Overweight/Buy
- 2 Equal Weight/Hold
- 3 Underweight/Sell
- SR Suspended
- NR Not Rated
- NE No Estimate

Atmos Energy Corp. (ATO) 3-yr. Price Performance



Date

Date	Published Price (\$)	Rating Code*	Price Target	Val. Rng. Low	Val. Rng. High	Close Price (\$)
7/14/2019		Akers				
7/14/2019	106.46	1	119	NE	NE	106.46
9/2/2019	110.23	1	123	NE	NE	110.23
11/7/2019	108.40	1	119	NE	NE	108.18
1/8/2020	110.74	1	122	NE	NE	110.74
2/5/2020	116.82	1	131	NE	NE	118.28
5/7/2020	96.55	1	108	NE	NE	96.38
8/3/2020	105.31	1	115	NE	NE	105.31
8/7/2020	104.70	1	117	NE	NE	105.71
9/24/2020	92.87	1	104	NE	NE	93.59
11/12/2020	98.72	1	114	NE	NE	98.72

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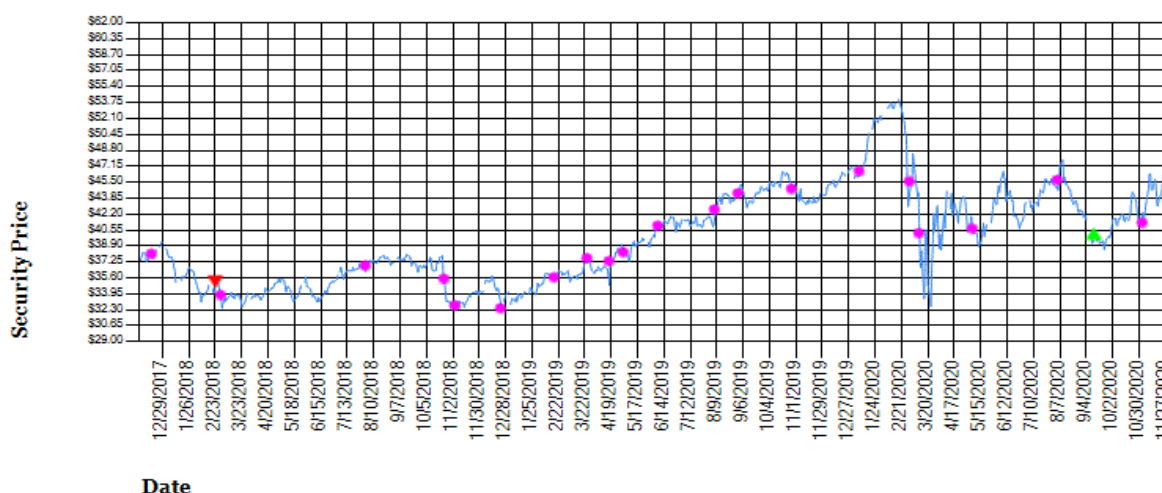
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- ▼ Rating Downgrade
- ▲ Rating Upgrade
- Price Target/Val Range Change
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Rating Code Key

- 1 Overweight/Buy
- 2 Equal Weight/Hold
- 3 Underweight/Sell
- SR Suspended
- NR Not Rated
- NE No Estimate

Essential Utilities, Inc. (WTRG) 3-yr. Price Performance



Date	Published Price (\$)	Rating Code*	Price Target	Val. Rng. Low	Val. Rng. High	Close Price (\$)
12/4/2017		Reeder				
12/4/2017	NA	1	40	NE	NE	37.67
12/18/2017	38.14	1	43	NE	NE	38.03
2/25/2018	35.00	2	37	NE	NE	35.00
3/1/2018	34.19	2	36	NE	NE	33.66
8/2/2018	36.70	2	38	NE	NE	36.70
10/24/2018	35.01	2	37	NE	NE	35.29
11/6/2018	32.70	2	35	NE	NE	32.59
12/24/2018	33.87	2	34	NE	NE	32.38
2/19/2019	35.54	2	36	NE	NE	35.52
3/26/2019	37.52	2	39	NE	NE	37.52
4/18/2019	36.52	2	38	NE	NE	37.15
5/3/2019	37.85	2	39	NE	NE	38.09
6/9/2019	40.84	2	42	NE	NE	40.84
8/8/2019	42.06	2	44	NE	NE	42.47
9/2/2019	44.29	2	47	NE	NE	44.29
10/29/2019	44.90	2	46	NE	NE	44.68
1/8/2020	46.51	2	48	NE	NE	46.51
3/2/2020	43.01	2	45	NE	NE	45.44
3/11/2020	44.41	2	48	NE	NE	40.03
5/7/2020	40.49	2	42	NE	NE	40.53
8/6/2020	45.56	2	45	NE	NE	45.56
9/14/2020	39.35	1	45	NE	NE	39.82
11/4/2020	41.19	1	47	NE	NE	41.19

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WTRG: Key risks relate to regulatory, Peoples gas deal integration and M&A strategy execution.

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As of: December 10, 2020

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